

Working Effectively With the Media

By Valerie A. Camarda

What course of action are you planning to take to promote your company? If business has slowed a bit and your marketing budget has been drastically cut, ask yourself this question: What's twice as credible as advertising, yet costs a fraction of advertising fees?

Answer: Publicity, of course.

That's why, in a world littered with print ads, billboards, commercials, web banners and junk mail, and unsolicited text messages everyone from tiny start-ups to giant corporations are pumping out press releases and trying to capture the attention of the media.

Creating a buzz can be the most effective and least expensive way for an organization to create a favorable public image, showcase the company's abilities and achievements and generate sales.

Editors readily admit that most of what you read in newspapers or see on the air comes about as a result of information provided by outside sources. Some experts estimate that 70% of all news is "planted" or originates from news releases. But to be a credible news release worthy of media attention, the information within must be *news* -- not history and not puffery.

Understanding What is Newsworthy

- You are not asking a favor when you provide a legitimate business news story.
- Whether or not a good news story is printed depends upon the importance of the news you provide, as well as the competition for the editorial space by other news sources: local, national, or international.
- You are the reporter's best source of information about your organization and your industry.
- Do your homework first:
 - Look at the newspapers/magazines/TV/Radio/ as your textbook
 - Why was a particular story reported?
 - What are the interests and needs of the media?

What Exactly is Publicity?

Any information or action that brings a person, service or cause to public notice is publicity. Special events are a means to publicity, not publicity itself.

- Set your publicity objectives. What do you want to accomplish? Set objectives that help reach specific business goals.
- Getting your message across and rising above the noise requires both creativity and elbow grease. What won't work is sending out a generic press release and doing a blanket mailing to all of the media outlets.

When You Prepare and Send Out Press Releases

- Know the media you are approaching. Make sure they use the sort of story you are sending and then customize your release to fit their format and preferences.
- When you send out a press kit include the following:
 1. Fact Sheet
 2. History or Backgrounder on the organization
 3. Personnel Profiles of key people
 4. A high quality captioned photograph
- Think like an editor. There are three considerations a good editor weighs when making a decision on a news story:
 1. Is it timely?
 2. Did it happen nearby?
 3. Is it about someone or something of interest to my readers, viewers or listeners?
- Write short, punchy copy. Try to begin with an intriguing idea, startling statistic or provocative statement. Use fresh, interesting quotes that enlighten and educate. Forget the fluff and self-complimentary copy: this is news, not ad content.
- Propose a roundup story that includes quotes from several sources, but focus on an area in which your company shines. An article on the creative and successful fundraiser that was attended by the city's top business leaders that you work with will get a lot more coverage than a press release praising your company's image or consulting capabilities. Link your announcement to a topical issue. One good way to find the news hook is to conduct a survey related to your product or service and publicize the results.
- Sometimes a cute, funny gimmick will work, but don't overdo it. Forget the envelopes full of confetti – reporters hate them.

- Call the publication and ask the receptionist or assistant what the deadline date is. Take this opportunity to ask how the journalist prefers to receive press releases – regular mail, e-mail or fax.
- If you telephone a reporter, don't simply reiterate the information contained in your initial pitch. Offer some new nugget of information so reporters won't feel you're wasting their time.

When the Media Calls You

- Be Responsive! Return their call promptly to meet their deadline.
- Write down their questions and think before you speak.
- **If you need time to respond or to gather more information, ask the reporter what his/her questions are and when their deadline is and explain you would like to gather a little more information and will get back to them within 15 minutes.**
- Try to anticipate questions the media will have and prepare a Fact Sheet ahead of time that will cover the major questions.
- Always assume you're on the record. Once you've said it, you can't go back and retroactively claim that what you just told a reporter is "off the record."
- If you can't help or must decline to comment, try to give a reason, such as 'I don't think I'm the best person to help you, but so-and-so could.'
- When you can't or don't want to be quoted, you still may be able to share your insight on a not-for-attribution basis. Offer to give the reporter background information that must be attributed to an unnamed source.

What does a television reporter look for in an interview?

You may not realize it, but television and radio reporters need you as much as you need them! When important news is breaking, reporters quickly look for experts who can put that news into proper context.

- Reporters tend to seek out business people who are acknowledged leaders in their fields or have familiar names. If you have already established a relationship or can make them aware of you at the right moment, you can quickly become the on-air authority they need.
- Business people who keep themselves well-briefed and up-to-date, especially in their field – and who are prepared at a moment's notice to provide educated remarks are at a premium. Reporters don't have time to waste when they're up against a deadline.

- Reporters are looking for someone who can discuss the subject in plain, easy-to-understand language and who can explain it in an orderly way.
- The media likes quotable quotes -- “sound bites”. Become the master of the one liner. Statements should be poignant, informative, dramatic, interesting and unusual and yes, sometimes controversial.
- The media seeks individuals who can express their views intelligently.
- Be understandable, simple and brief.
- Speak with authority.

When You Are Being Interviewed for TV

Great! You’ve landed a spot on a TV interview show. Whether you’re talking to Charlie Rose or Piers Morgan or a commentator in Iowa City, these tips will help you tell your story in a winning way:

- Wear jewel-tone colors
- Don’t wear patterns that will cause a moiré pattern on TV
- Don’t wear plaids. Remember that TV adds 10 pounds so you want to wear simple clothes that are form fitting and flattering.
- If you’re sitting down during the interview remember to pull down the back of your jacket and sit on it so you don’t get that “hunchback” look.
- A woman should apply her everyday makeup. Have a little translucent face powder handy to bring down the shine on skin.
- Don’t fidget!
- Before film starts rolling ask where you should be looking so you don’t have that “bewildered” look.
- Use hand gestures for emphasis.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Use short sentences.
- Be opinionated!
- Sound passionate!
- Listen carefully to questions being asked and answer the questions.
- Try not to use jargon unless you are going to explain the words you are using.



Remember, when dealing with the media, always think long-range and try to build continuing relationships. The media gravitates toward sources who are reliable, quick-thinking and able to simplify complicated issues. Reporters prefer to go to dependable sources. Frequently, the fastest and easiest thing to do is contact authoritative business people who have been quoted before.

Valerie Camarda is the owner of Marketing Sense, a marketing and public relations consulting firm located in San Francisco. With over 20 years of marketing experience, Valerie has both consumer products and professional services marketing experience. She has worked with well-known brands such as Dole, Bumble Bee, Taco Bell and The Bank of California. She has worked with hundreds of entrepreneurial businesses, non-profits and professional associations. She develops marketing plans, public relations and advertising campaigns and a wide variety of marketing materials for her clients.